



CONTACT NUMBER: 815-987-4444

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**ROCKFORD MAN SENTENCED TO 12 YEARS IN FEDERAL PRISON
ON FIREARM AND MARIJUANA CHARGES**

ROCKFORD – PATRICK J. FITZGERALD, United States Attorney for the Northern District of Illinois; LARRY FORD, Special Agent-In-Charge of the Chicago Office of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF); PAUL A. LOGLI, Winnebago County State's Attorney; and STEVEN PUGH, Chief of the Rockford Police Department, today made the following announcement:

United States District Judge Philip G. Reinhard today sentenced **KEVIN T. ROMEZ**, 26 (DOB: 4/15/77), 2947 Bluffside Drive, Rockford, Illinois, to 12 years in federal prison without parole for being a felon in possession of a firearm, possession with intent to distribute approximately 2,985 grams of marijuana, and carrying a firearm during the drug trafficking crime. In addition to 12 years in prison, the court ordered Romez to serve five years of supervised release following his release from prison, and to pay a fine of \$300.

On November 4, 2003, Romez pleaded guilty and admitted that on September 14, 2001 he was driving an automobile owned by his girlfriend. In the trunk of the automobile, defendant had stored plastic baggies containing a total of 2,985 grams of marijuana, which he intended to sell to others at a later time. Inside the automobile, defendant was carrying a loaded Browning Hi-Power 9 mm semi-automatic pistol in order to protect himself while he possessed the marijuana. Romez had previously been convicted of a felony. Police officers arrested Romez on September 14, 2001, at a tire store located on Sandy Hollow Road in Rockford. Romez was indicted on the federal charges on July 16, 2002. He remained a fugitive until he was arrested by Rockford Police on May 12, 2003.

First charged by the Winnebago County States Attorney's Office under state law, Romez was transferred to federal court where he was charged under tough federal firearms laws as part of the Project Safe Neighborhoods program. Project Safe Neighborhoods is an intensive, cooperative effort between local, state, and federal law enforcement to attack gun crimes. The cornerstone of the program is that every state defendant with a gun will be reviewed for possible federal prosecution in order to target the harshest penalties for the worst offenders. Additional information about Project Safe Neighborhoods may be found at www.psn.gov.

The case was investigated by the Rockford office of the ATF, and the Rockford Police Department. The case was prosecuted in federal court by Assistant United States Attorney John G. McKenzie.

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